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### Seeing the world of physical culture: The potential of visual methods for qualitative research in sport and exercise

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Adopting visual methods can enhance our understanding of the social world. By encompassing a multitude of forms including photographs, videos, maps, diagrams, symbols and so forth, images can provide specific information about our existence. They can also act as powerful indicators regarding the multiple meanings embedded within our culture. One domain where the use of visual methods has been less well documented is that of physical culture. Physical culture is taken here to mean human physical movement occurring within recognised cultural domains such as sport, dance and, more broadly, outdoor and indoor recreational activities involving expression through physicality. Opening this special edition of *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* on 'Visual Methods in Physical Cultures', I provide some broad responses to the following questions: What are visual methods? Why might they be useful? How can they be utilised? I then outline some ongoing debates within the field surrounding issues of interpretation, representation and ethics. I conclude by positioning this special edition as a resource to assist with the continued use of visual methods in physical culture.

**Keywords:** visual methods; sport and exercise sciences; physical culture; researcher-created; respondent-created

## Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a significant growth in the use of visual data within qualitative research. Such growth reflects a rising appreciation of the ubiquity of imagery and visual culture in every day life, as evident by the growing number of texts focusing upon the analysis of visual representations, visual methods or both (e.g. see van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001, Knowles and Sweetman 2004, Banks 2007, Pink 2007, Rose 2007). Indeed, scholars working within a number of different disciplines have become increasingly aware that adopting visual methods has the potential to further develop our understanding of the social world. One domain where the use of visual methods has been less well documented is that of physical culture. Physical culture is taken here to mean human physical movement occurring within recognised cultural domains such as sport, dance and, more broadly, outdoor and indoor recreational activities involving expression through physicality.

The purpose of this special edition of *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise* on 'Visual Methods in Physical Cultures' is to address this lacuna. It brings together a range of qualitative research projects that have employed a variety of visual methods in order to 'see the way' of physical culture. Prior to introducing each of the contributions in the special edition, I offer – as point of departure and painting with broad strokes – brief responses to the following questions: What are visual methods and why might they be useful? How might they be utilised in qualitative research? What cautions accompany the use of these methods?

### **What are visual methods and why might they be useful?**

According to Harrison (2004), 'visual methods' describes any research design, which utilises visual evidence. Cameras and photographic images are drawn upon most widely, although this form of research can also include maps, diagrams, sketches, posters, websites, signs and symbols. Inclusion of different sorts of technologies and the images that they produce renders the world in visual terms, enabling insight into what the eye can physiologically see ('vision'), and also how vision is culturally constructed ('visuality'; Rose 2007). For Grady (2004), an image can be extremely objective – a record of what occurred at a given moment – yet its interpretation is entirely subjective. In this sense, 'images usually represent complex subjective processes in an extraordinarily objective form' (Grady 2004, p. 18). They can act as an impetus for asking questions such as: How are we *able* to see? How are we *allowed* to see it? How are we *made* to see? *What* is being seen, and *how* is it socially shaped?

Incorporating visual methods into the field of physical culture is useful for a number of reasons. First, they can offer a different way of 'knowing' the world of physical culture, which goes beyond knowledge constructed and communicated through written and spoken word alone. This is important given Knowles and Sweetman's (2004) suggestion that visuality is a fundamental fact of social existence, and that sighted individuals navigate the social world visually. For these authors, mass culture itself might best be described as 'hyper-visual'. Similarly, Banks (2007) has also noted the importance of taking visuality into account by suggesting that images are ever present within society, and accordingly, the study of society must at some level be attentive to the role of what we see. Second, visual images can act as unique forms of data that have the ability to amass complexly layered meanings in a format, which is both accessible and easily retrievable to researchers, participants and audiences alike.

Third, images are powerful in that they can *do* things. Images can evoke a particular kind of response. Thinking, writing, presenting and discussing with images, suggests Grady (2004), can make arguments *more* vivid and *more* lucid than alternative forms of representation. Visual images, therefore, have the ability to construct and convey arguments whilst powerfully indicating the multiple meanings embedded within (physical) culture. None of this, of course, is to say that visual methods can do everything or are a panacea for understanding. They are not. They are, however one valuable way to examine our social world and physical culture. Thus, qualitative researchers might consider harnessing their potential and incorporating them for certain purposes into their methodological 'tool box'.

### **How might visual methods be utilised within qualitative research in sport and exercise?**

The relationship of visual data to the questions or concepts being addressed is one that requires close attention. Indeed, Harrison (2002) urges researchers to consider whether or not the use of visual methods is appropriate, by asking how they might contribute to an understanding of a said concept in ways that words cannot. That is, can the sociological or psychological ideas that we are exploring be expressed and represented visually? Such questions become salient, she argues, in light of the recent 'anyone can do it' boom that visual methods have undergone within some areas of qualitative research, and indeed people's increased familiarity and engagement with the associated visual technologies.

With increased uptake across a range of social sciences, now more than ever the use of visual data requires researchers to demonstrate knowledge of theoretical and empirical understandings – not only concerning the sociological ideas that are being examined – but also of the visual itself (see van Leewen and Jewitt 2001, Banks 2007, Pink 2007 for further information). For instance, Knowles and Sweetman (2004) suggest that there are, broadly speaking, three key theoretical approaches to visual images within social research: images as *evidence*, images as *constructions* of reality and images as *texts*. Meanwhile, Harrison (2002) distinguishes between *the visual as topic* (i.e. the visual itself as the subject of investigation) and *the visual as resource* (i.e. the visual as a means of accessing data about other topics of investigation). An example of the latter approach within the sport and exercise sciences can be seen in Smith's (2008) work on the meaning of pain amongst professional wrestlers. Locating his research in the tradition of symbolic interactionism, Smith utilises a series of images to provide additional contextual information regarding a pro-wrestling competition environment, and of injuries characteristically sustained during combat.

In terms of how and by whom visual material might be produced, Banks (2007) loosely divides between *the creation of images by the researcher* (i.e. the use of images to study society) and *the collection and study of images produced or consumed by the subjects of the research* (i.e. the sociological study of images). These approaches, however, should not be viewed as mutually exclusive, nor exhaustive of all visual research within the social sciences. Rather, as Banks notes, in either approach – and depending upon the research questions being posed – researchers may find themselves conducting surveys, interviewing participants, collecting life histories and so forth. Prosser and Loxley (2008) elaborate upon this issue further: Ultimately, (as well as cumulatively) visual researchers will choose to place their metaphorical fulcrum either closer to researching 'on' respondents and hence seeing them as the 'other', or closer to collaborating 'with' respondents and seeing them as experts in their own lives. (p. 16) In what follows, using the template offered by these authors of *researcher-created visual data* and *respondent-generated visual data*, I seek to illustrate how visual methods are, and could be, utilised to gain further insight into the world of physical culture.

### ***Researcher-created (or -found) visual data***

Whilst the visual perceptions of researchers can be converted into sketches and diagrams, signs, words, codes and numbers, still and moving photography continues to be the primary means of documenting, representing and analysing within visual sociology and anthropology (Prosser and Loxley 2008). Photographs 'may *not* provide us with unbiased, objective documentation of the social and material world, but they *can* show characteristic attributes of people, objects, and events that often elude even the most skilled wordsmiths' (*emphasis added*, Prosser and Schwartz 1998, p. 116). These authors suggest that via photographs the researcher is able to explore relationships that may be subtle or easily overlooked.

Furthermore, a sense of the emotions evoked by particular activities, environments and interactions might be communicated more effectively and provide an alternative, and at times more tangible way of knowing (see Griffin, this issue). For example, the researcher-created images shown below were produced as part of my own work with mature, natural bodybuilders. They were taken in a commercial gym (Figure 1) and a bodybuilding gym (Figure 2).

By *showing* how the same general message was communicated differently within each of these locations, the images offer insight into how the social space of the gym is managed to create and sustain the (gendered) environment of 'soft gym' versus 'hard gym'.



Figure 1. Image produced by Phoenix (2009).



Figure 2. Image produced by Phoenix (2009).

When used as a part of ethnographic fieldwork (see Atkinson, this issue, Pope, this issue), visual methods are likely to be employed in complex field interactions, being undertaken alongside interviews, note-taking and participant observation. Photography in this context can provide the researcher with useful and meaningful visual information. It can also 'potentially construct continuities between the visual culture of an academic discipline and that of the subjects or collaborators in the research' (Pink 2007, p. 66). Such strengths of researcher-created visual data can be found within the work of a small group of ethnographers working within the field of sport and exercise sciences. For example, Hockey and Allen Collinson (2006) weave together photographs and autoethnographic data to offer the reader specific cultural knowledge concerning how distance runners 'see the way'. By including photography in their

methods, they provide insight into runner's embodied feelings and experience of momentum along a typical running route. As the reader is led visually and verbally up slopes, through an underpass, across a busy road and along grassy playing fields, Hockey and Allen Collinson offer an effective way of communicating just how distance runners experience their training terrain. They also show how what we see means different things to different people. For instance, looking at a grassy park area for some might signify open space, leisure time and an opportunity for a 'kick around' with friends. In the sub-culture of running, however, the same scene may be translated into knowledge of: marshy patches, unruly dogs, protruding tree roots and so forth, each holding the potential to induce or aggravate a new, or existing running injury.

Any photograph, it would seem, can hold some form of ethnographic interest, connotation or significance at particular moments in time, for particular people, and for particular reasons. Elaborating upon this point further, Pink (2007) explains: The meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective; they depend on who is looking. The same photographic image may have a variety (perhaps conflicting) meanings invested in it at different stages of ethnographic research and representation, as it is viewed by different eyes and audiences in diverse temporal historical, spatial and cultural contexts. Photographs produced as part of an ethnographic project will be given different meanings by the subjects of those images, local people in that context, the researcher, and other (sometimes critical) audiences. (pp. 67–68)



Figure 3. Image produced by Phoenix and Sparkes (2009).

An example of this situation is offered using the image shown in Figure 3, which is taken from my own research. For an onlooker, this photograph may depict an image of an older man feeding some chickens from behind a wire fence. For the man featured in the image, the photograph might remind him of the time when a young, female researcher from the University of Exeter came to visit. He had been showing her around the local area and they had stopped for a coffee at his local farm shop. She took the photograph as he threw stale bread, which he brought from home, to the farm shop's flock of free-range chickens. For the owner of the farm shop, the image might demonstrate one of the attractions of his business – the interaction that customers can experience with his livestock. Thus, it might be viewed in relation to its potential as a marketing device. Finally, for me, the researcher, this image speaks of ageing, natural bodybuilding and diet.

The man featured in the image is 73-year old Eric Dowey, former Olympia Master's Champion in natural bodybuilding. Central to the discipline of natural bodybuilding is diet, and during the time that I spent with Eric, I gained insight into the prominent role that diet played in his life. I learnt that food *quality* (aside from the stereotypical assumptions regarding bodybuilders and

food quantity) was crucially important to Eric. He regularly visited the farm shop to purchase free-range eggs and organic chicken breast. Feeding the chickens had become part of this routine. On a broader level, the meanings behind this image might shed additional light onto how we understand the ageing body – what it can and cannot do, and the heterogeneity within the bodybuilding community. In particular, the meaning behind images such as Figure 3, might call into question the stereotypical assumptions that all bodybuilders possess ‘freakish’ hypermuscular physiques and engage in behaviours that are detrimental to their health.

### ***Respondent-generated visual data***

Respondent-generated data promotes the use of visual methods in a way that encourages greater co-operation with the participants. This might involve the researcher working alongside the participant throughout the project to co-produce (visual) knowledge about a particular social issue (see Krane *et al.*, this issue, Kluge *et al.*, this issue). Alternatively, participants may work more independently over a set period of time to produce their own visual data. For example, the use of video diaries (see Chaplin 2004) and auto-photography projects (Phoenix, forthcoming) involve the power of the camera being turned over to research participants to document the images/footage they choose, and in some instances to story their meanings collaboratively with investigators (see Azzarito and Sterling, this issue, Sims-Gould *et al.*, this issue).

Working *with* respondents in this manner can provide another layer of insight into individual lives by enabling researchers to view the participant’s world through their eyes. For this reason, it has been recognised as an especially useful form of data collection for understanding the experiences of marginalised groups (see D’Alonzo and Sharma, this issue). It can also provide respondents with a sense of agency and opportunity to speak for themselves, and subsequently help to erase the traditional power imbalance between researcher and participant (Pink 2007, Packard 2008). Moreover, participants are able to use their bodies and the space around them to ‘*show*’ rather than just ‘*tell*’ about their lives (Riessman 2008). Referring to video diaries in particular, Holliday (2007, p. 61) proposes that their usefulness lies in their potential to persuade audiences to ‘bear witness’ to the lives that are filmed, whilst also providing them with the means to reflect upon their own (see Cherrington and Watson, this issue). In addition to auto-photography and video-diary projects, graphical-elicitation, creative methods and arts-based research methods (see Gravestock, this issue) can also appear under the umbrella of respondent-generated visual data (Prosser and Loxley 2008).

Westcott (2007) utilised creative methods as a means of documenting her experiences of an unexpected physical trauma to her eye that caused periods of blindness and intense migraines. As an undergraduate student from a sport and exercises science degree programme, and player for the university ladies football team, Westcott’s reflexive narrative of the self tells of the inescapable erosion of her previously taken for granted assumptions about a smoothly functioning athletic body. It speaks of the disruption to her sense of body-self unity that resulted from ‘two years of investigations comprising of biopsies, steroids, MRI scans, weekly hospital appointments and massive amounts of prodding and manipulation’ of her right eye (Westcott 2007, p. 20). At times, however, the sensations and emotions that she encountered during this period were beyond written and spoken word. Instead, she drew the images presented in Figures 4 and 5 in an attempt to *show* her embodiment of excruciating pain, depression and isolation more fully.



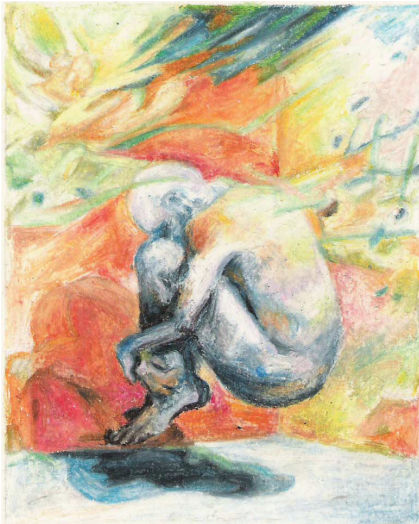


Figure 4. 'Isolation' image produced by Westcott (2007).

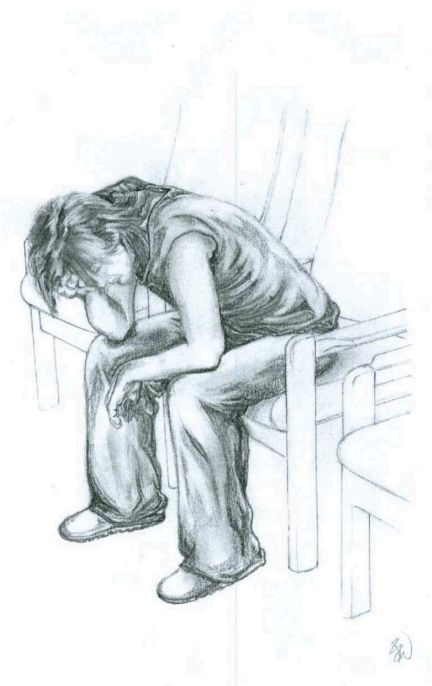


Figure 5. 'Accident & Emergency' image produced by Westcott (2007).

Westcott (2007) signalled that more than photographs do, drawings can allow those who are the subjects of the research to shape how they see themselves, and are potentially seen by others. Whilst in some instances of creative methods, there may be a close affinity with photo and graphic elicitation, the participatory principle here is further emphasised by the respondents ownership and agency through the act of creation. Analysis, meanwhile, can focus on *what* is constructed, *how* it is constructed, and the *ways of seeing* the images that are produced relative to context of production and reception (Riessman 2008).

### Using visual methods: ongoing debates



Image-based research is a lively domain spanning a variety of disciplines. Accordingly, the presence of ongoing debates and discussions are very much part of its character and appeal (and for some, frustration). In this section, I signal three areas where debate and discussion are rife: the issue of *interpretation*, the issue of *representation* and, briefly, the issue of *ethics*. It should be emphasised that I do not seek to settle any of these debates. My purpose is to draw attention to them so that researchers working within the sport and exercise sciences intending to use visual methods might be in a stronger position to make informed choices about how to conduct, analyse and present their project.

One continual topic of contestation is that of *interpretation*. Undoubtedly, there are diverse approaches employed when collecting and analysing visual data as observed by van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001). These authors highlight how some methods of analysis are more methodological than others, outlining very precise criteria for analysis and in doing so offer an impression that visual analysis can be followed in much the same 'step-by-step' way as a recipe in a cookbook. Other forms of analysis are far less precise, especially those found within cultural studies, narrative inquiry and ethnomethodology, where analysis is viewed far more as a complex process. The researcher is required to shift between, on the one hand, a careful structural analysis of set parts, whilst, on the other hand, demonstrating an intuitive grasp of the whole. Sorting through evidence with specific questions is combined with sensitivity to the data's subtleties and overtones. For van Leeuwen and Jewitt, it is the employment of artistic or intuitive creativity that is essential to discovery *alongside* systematic detailed analysis that optimises the usefulness of interpreting visual images. Thus, whilst the variety of approaches to interpret one's visual data can initially feel unnerving, it can also be recognised as an endearing trait. Indeed, Pink (2007) has gone so far as suggesting that the very presence of textbooks offering prescriptive frameworks which encourage distance, objectivity and generalizability detracts from the very strengths, uncertainties and expressivity that can be gleaned from visual methods.

The topic of *representation* is a familiar one within qualitative research, and comprehensively discussed by Andrew Sparkes (2002) in his book, 'Telling Tales in Sport & Physical Activity'. Absent from this publication is a chapter focusing upon imaged-based research. This is perhaps indicative of the traditional tendency to focus on words within qualitative research in sport and exercise sciences. Yet, how best to represent visual research seems to be a contested area within the field of visual studies itself (for different media and modes of visual data representation, see Prosser and Loxley 2008). A critical area of this argument centres on the relationship of images with text.

Referring specifically to photography, Harrison (2004) asks, is it 'possible for photographs to narrate independent of written or oral word?' (p. 113). Should visual data 'speak for itself' and be left to the interpretation of its audience? By inserting written or spoken commentary alongside images, are we defeating the very power and purpose of the visual? Harrison distinguishes between what people *see* in an image, and what people may *say* about it. She proposes – and I am inclined to agree – that it is through some form of verbalisation that we generally have to rely in order to gain understanding of an image, much the same as people communicate the meaning of visual images in everyday life. It is not that pictures cannot tell stories in themselves, or that viewers cannot be invited to 'see' images in this way, but rather for the social scientist, we need to know what these stories or readings are ... Its [the images] narration will provide us with an understanding of how it is such images do their 'work' as a material part of people's everyday lives (Harrison 2004, p. 132)

Take, for example, the photograph shown in Figure 6: What does this say to you?... What meaning is being conveyed here?... If, as we looked on, I said to you 'this picture says so much, doesn't it!', would you (feel pressure to) agree? Why?...Why not? (For those who require some form of 'verbalisation' to glean anything from this image, refer to Note 1).



Figure 6. Image provided by Phoenix (2009).

In contrast to Harrison (2004), Rich (2004) argues that 'showing is telling'. He bemoans the assumption that images must be translated into words for analysis and discussion to occur, and asserts that doing so reinforces a lack of clarity and cohesion that plagues visual research. Likewise, the suggestion that 'pictures don't say anything, words do' is fiercely challenged by Chalfen (2004). He argues that rather than asking 'what is this image saying/doing?', the question should be 'what do we bring to this image in conjunction with what we are supposed to do with this visual text (if anything)?' (Chalfen 2004, p. 145). Such an approach, Chalfen suggests, take us in a more fruitful direction – a direction where the material and symbolic significance of the image acts as a vehicle of communication, which contributes to the fabric of social relations.

A key issue within this ongoing area of tension concerning the issue of representation appears to be the prioritising and valuing of *verbal* knowledge over *visual* knowledge. Yet, visual studies have also received criticism that sight is regularly foregrounded at the expense of other senses like smell and taste. Researchers should be aware of this when considering the use of visual methods, and be mindful of what other senses can offer as ways of knowing. This has been recently published in *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise Sciences* by Sparkes (2009), Hockey and Allen Collinson (2007) and Allen Collinson (2009). These authors have made strong cases for bringing the senses into sport and exercise sciences. Sensorial experiences are important because sensory relationships are essential domains of cultural expression and communication, and are the means by which values are enacted. Prosser and Loxley (2008) note how creative research methods, including sensory (of which vision can claim to be the dominant sense) and arts-based approaches are increasingly emerging as researchers strive to answer more complex questions about (visual) society. To date, more common contributions to this genre include collage as inquiry, installation art-as-research and ethnodrama (see Sparkes 2002, Douglas and Carless 2005).

Visual-based research is dynamic and multidimensional. As an increasing number of qualitative researchers make the 'visual turn', to ensure distinctiveness and robustness of visual studies, we must familiarise ourselves with the lay of the land. We must become

articulate in theoretical and conceptual debates. And, as we negotiate new terrains in terms of data collection, interpretation and representation, we must ensure that we do no harm to our informants and work with visual data in moral and ethical ways. It is this topic in particular to which I turn now. Knowles and Sweetman (2004, p. 12) suggest that there are a number of key difficulties with visual methods, not least considerations that should include, 'the problem of ascribing anonymity or confidentiality to research subjects who have been photographed, equipment costs associated with the use of photography and video, difficulties with dissemination – particularly where images are in a moving form – and issues of copyright where already existing images are employed'. The issue of ethics is also huge, (hugely) complex, and has been comprehensively discussed elsewhere in ways that go beyond the scope of this overview (see Simons and Usher 2000).<sup>2</sup> Suffice to say that like all forms of social research, ethical considerations are relevant to each stage of the visual research process from its initial conception to the final dissemination of the results and beyond. Pink's (2007) sentiments directed towards visual ethnographers are especially worthy here. She suggests that: Ultimately, the decision will be a personal one for each ethnographer has to decide whether his or her research practices and representations are ethical before these are held up to the scrutiny of others who will then interpret this question for themselves. (Pink

2007, p. 51)

In my work with mature, natural bodybuilders like Pink, I felt obliged to 'protect' my informants by attempting to represent them as health-conscious, relational individuals, and portray their understanding of bodybuilding in a way that suggested that they did not fit the 'drug fuelled, obsessive underworld' that others often associate with bodybuilding per se. A second point worth noting here is Pink's proposal that when using visual methods, consent should be *ongoing*. Obtaining initial informed consent, she argues, should not be considered to give the researcher the moral right to use the image in unrestricted ways over time and within different contexts.

Ethical issues within visual research do indeed constitute what Prosser (2000) terms a 'moral maze'. Careful and ongoing consideration is required by the researcher, who must also be simultaneously receptive of ethical frameworks advocated by other forms of qualitative research (participant observation, interviewing and so forth). Yet the complexity should not become a reason to halt the progression of viable, responsible and potentially enlightening visual method projects. On this issue, Prosser and Loxley (2008) contend that due to the relative newness of visually orientated research – as is especially the case within the field of physical culture – there is limited agreement amongst ethics committees and visual researchers on ethical guidelines and resultant practices. This lack of consensus is particularly prominent here because visual-based research constitutes a range of visual media applied in a number of ways, and does not form a homogeneous collection of technologies, procedures or techniques. Prosser and Loxley express concern at the gatekeeper status often afforded to codes of practices and ethics committees within universities and other institutional settings. They argue that overly restrictive situations can easily arise, protecting institutions and sponsors at the expense of letting participant's stories be heard. The reason being that, 'committees comprise of members from epistemologically dissimilar academic disciplines who would scrutinize proposals differently and may look on minority (visual) methods judgementally' (Prosser and Loxley 2008, p. 48). As qualitative researchers, perhaps this is a familiar scenario to us all.

In this respect, the latest contribution by Denzin (2009) is thought provoking and might stir 'a narrative of passion and commitment' (p. 82) in colleagues who find or have found their (visual) work being judged, graded and perhaps even blocked by positivists and post-positivists operating within science-based research (SBR). As we progress across relatively new terrain – such as the use of visual methods in the study of physical culture – to draw upon Denzin's words, our experiences might resonate with those of an intruder, like an elephant in the SBR movement's living room. Yet, Denzin also offers an alternative interpretation of this scenario and invites qualitative researchers to consider that, maybe, the elephant is in fact located in *our* living room. He explains:

With notable exceptions, we have tried to ignore this [SBR] presence. Denial has fed codependency. We need the negative presence of the SBR to define who we are. For example, we have not taken up the challenge of better educating policymakers, showing them how qualitative research and our views of practical science, interpretation, performance ethics can positively contribute to projects embodying restorative justice, equity, and better schooling. (Denzin 2009, p. 81)

The time has come, it would seem, to engage policymakers, grant-funding bodies, directors of research and ethics committees in a dialogue about alternative ways of conducting and evaluating quality research within sport, exercise and health sciences. We have not always engaged SBR advocates in these conversations, and nor have they always accepted our invitations for dialogue. Yet, if we are to move forward positively, we must resist the temptation of embedding ourselves within a victim narrative.

Though easily recounted when negotiating with committees whose templates seem ill aligned to our research aspirations, Denzin (2009) argues that we must strive to take some responsibility ourselves, for 'we have allowed the SBR elephant to set the terms of the conversation' (p. 81). For those of us working within the domain of physical culture, perhaps this special edition might equip us with a resource that can assist us as we proceed with this educational and dialogical task.

### **Introducing the special edition on *visual methods in physical cultures***

I am thrilled to introduce this special edition of *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise Sciences* on 'Visual Methods in Physical Cultures'. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all who have *made this happen*; the authors, whose contributions have ensured a varied and exciting additions to the field; the reviewers for a willingness to share their expertise and experience in image-based research; QRSE editors David Gilbourne and Brett Smith – the special edition would not have been possible without their insight, receptiveness and encouragement to pursue qualitative research in sport and exercise; the publishers Taylor and Francis for their continued support in this venture, particularly shown in the construction and management of the journal's website (<http://www.informaworld.com/rqrs>).

The edition opens with two visual ethnography papers. The first examines the sport of fell running by Canadian-based Michael Atkinson. Drawing upon French post-structural theory, he infographically illustrates the allure of post-sports like fell running to people who wish to immerse themselves in rather novel contexts of desire producing, personally rewarding and spiritual activity. This is followed by Clive Pope's visual ethnography of New Zealand's major high school rowing competition 'the Maadi Cup'. Pope's analytical focus is concerned with the

material culture of the competition, namely the wearing and trading of T-shirts by the competitors. Moving from researcher-*created* data, to researcher-*found* data, the next contribution is from

Meridith Griffin who considers the role of visual and material culture within a UK based women's only running group (the Women's Running Network) to examine how women are *told* and *shown* particular gendered and embodied identities prior to joining the club. Having discussed how the media and running organisation(s) construct visual images to portray the sporting body in a particular way, the fifth paper in this edition by Vikki Krane and colleagues takes a slightly different approach. Joining feminist cultural studies and social psychological theory, these authors examine how a group of US female college athletes *prefer* to be represented by inviting them to direct their own photo shoot. Branching away from photography, Hannah Gravestock brings to the edition an ethnographic study of arts-based research. Focusing on drawings of the performing body, and the sport of figure skating, she discusses the external visualisation of an internal thought process through mark-making and considers the potential it has for the field of image-based research.

The following three papers convincingly illustrate the value of auto-photography studies for understanding informant's experiences of physical culture. Together, they highlight the suitability of this respondent-led method for including hard-to-reach/ marginalised groups. In doing so, they illustrate the rich insight that can be gained when including all age groups into the research agenda of sport and exercise sciences. Laura Azzarito and colleague Jennifer Sterling begin by exploring the ways in which young people of different ethnicities in two inner-city UK schools engage in physical culture within their everyday lives. Next, Karen D'Alonzo and Manoj Sharma focus upon the influence of *marianismo* beliefs on participation in habitual and incidental physical activity amongst middle-aged immigrant Hispanic women living in the USA. The final auto-photography study featured in this special edition is that of Canadian-based Joanie Sims-Gould and her colleagues, who examine how older women perceive and visualize their physical health and the benefits of engaging in an exercise programme.

Shifting the focus from physical education, health and well-being *back to* competitive- sporting performance, Jim Cherrington and Beccy Watson co-author the first of two contributions that use the medium of film to gather respondent-generated data. Their paper 'Shooting a diary, not just a hoop' illuminates the significance of video diaries as creative visual methods within social science-based research on sport. Members of a UK University men's basketball team were invited to keep video diaries over a period of time as a means to gain insight into the everyday, identity, and the body. Finally, reminding us that athletic performance is not exclusive to the young, the concluding paper by Mary Ann Kluge (in collaboration with colleagues from the USA and New Zealand) outlines the process, problems and possibilities of making a documentary film. The film in question was developed with, and about her friend and colleague, Linda Glick who, at the age of 65, decided to become a masters athlete and compete in the US Colorado State Senior Games. Clips of the video diaries, film and (colour) images produced by all of the contributors can be found on the journal's website at <http://www.informaworld.com/rqrs>. All at QRSE along with myself hope that you will find this special edition thought provoking, exciting and insightful. We also hope that it will act as an impetus for further high quality, high impact (however one chooses to define it) image-based research within the field of physical culture.

## Notes

1. This photograph of a lion statue was produced by a mature natural bodybuilder (male) as part of an auto-photography task. He had been asked to show what 'a month in his life' was like through photography. Amongst the many images he produced during this time, a significant proportion depicted the lion; cuddly toys, fridge magnets, paintings, a statue in his garden (as shown), and a bronze sculpture in his house. During the follow up interview, I asked what the significance of the lion was to his life. He replied: I'm a Leo I was born in August so therefore I use the symbol of my birthday as a style just to show of my activity, my identity really and that's where the lion comes ... Even in my garden there's a lion statue. I've got a lot of soft toys that are lions. A lot of people actually give me gifts of lions because that's what they look at me as being. They say I look like a lion, you know what I mean, I growl like one sometimes as well (laughs) and then there's the hair ... But it's a good sign because a lion is strength, power, and a king of the other animals, and respect, so therefore if you come to that, all the good qualities of that like you *carry out your Leo birthright, fight power with power*. This further elaboration brings, in my opinion, far richer meaning to what the symbol of the lion signifies in the participants life, than the image does alone.

<sup>2</sup>. I would also direct readers towards the statement of ethical practice for The British Sociological Association's Visual Sociology Group: [http://www.visualsociology.org.uk/about/ethical\\_statement.php](http://www.visualsociology.org.uk/about/ethical_statement.php)).

### Notes on contributor

Dr Cassandra Phoenix's research interests focus on narrative inquiry and visual methods to explore the ageing body and physical culture. This work has been published in a range of peer-reviewed journals including *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *Ageing & Society*, *Time & Society*, *Qualitative Research and Sport*, *Education and Society*. She is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* and *Journal of Aging Studies*. Cassandra is currently leading a qualitative project funded by The Nuffield Foundation, which draws upon the experiences of mature natural bodybuilders.

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